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Terranea Resort: L.A.'s Unlikely Cliffside Haven On The Palos Verdes Peninsula



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I cover the world of travel with gusto...literally, the world. [FULL BIO](#) ▾

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Smoked salt, rosemary-flavored salt and salt infused with Meyer lemon: All those tasty condiments come right from the sea below [Terranea Resort](#) at the tip of L.A.'s Palos Verdes peninsula. Executive Chef Bernard Ibarra's team hauls buckets of seawater up the cliffs to pour into evaporation pans at the property's [salt conservatory](#). On first Saturdays, guests can see firsthand at the Sea Salt Workshop how nature does its work.



With Terranea Resort facing south, guests enjoy both great views of sunrise, as here, and sunset.

It's heartening that the sea water quality is that excellent, that indigenous plant life thrives and yellow mustard bursts in springtime all over these Palos Verdes hills that lie smack next to one of the world's busiest ports. With its two miles of coastal trails facing Catalina Island, the eight-year-old Terranea Resort will transport you to California of old.

A member of the [Destinations Hotel](#) family, Terranea inherited the site of the old Marineland of the Pacific, the popular oceanarium designed in the 1950s by architect William Pereira who was responsible in part for LAX's iconic Theme Building. But who needs to see orcas in tanks when the waters off Palos Verdes are one of the great Pacific whale watching sites.



A very happy Terranea Resort Executive Chef Bernard Ibarra tending the property's rich garden.

In the 1980s, when Marineland went under, so to speak, the site lay dormant for decades, which was a blessing perhaps in that its original coral trees were preserved. Two years ago, a \$9 million dollar enhancement project was completed that encompassed all of the 102-acre Terranea (with the proceeds from selling old furnishings going to Habitat for Humanity).

Today, guests face the option each day of choosing between the sybaritic life, or one of adventure. You can sip cocktails in front of the Lobby Bar's fireplace, and out on its heated terrace, or around the private fire pit outside your own bungalow or villa for that matter. You can also lounge at any of four saltwater-treated swimming pools, two of which are adults-only, and frolic down a 140-foot waterslide in another.

Or, you can be more ambitious and follow a naturalist down the cliffs to actual tide pools where you might get lucky and spot increasingly rare starfish. You can kayak the coastal waters in front of the property (after which, from the comfort of your tub in the spa you'll look out at other kayakers busting their butt). After you grab your golf clubs and hit the property's nine-hole course, you might also sign up for the property's Lexus test drive program.

Among the larger four of Terranea's seven dining establishments which the Basque chef Ibarra oversees, the signature restaurant Mar'sel (a portmanteau combining the Spanish word for sea and French for salt) has stunning patio views of the sea. Not surprisingly in this setting, Chef de Cuisine Andrew Vaughan prepares gorgeous seafood platters, while his menu takes advantage of the many herbs and varied produce from the property's own garden.



The views from the patio at Mar'sel restaurant are a big draw, in addition to its fine cuisine.

In addition to overseeing a rich sushi bar at Bashi, Chef de Cuisine DJ Eusebio invents unique fusions of Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian dishes. If the wide variety of sakes aren't already enough, Bashi is also a fun venue in which to sample cocktail creations by the property mixologist Adam Stearns. His "Himalayan Lassi" with cognac, Domaine de Canton, and mango-turmeric lassi is insanely good. Stearns also conducts mixology classes.

For non-Terranea guests, the prodigious buffet brunch alone at the newly renovated Catalina Kitchen, with an enormous shaded patio, would be worth negotiating L.A. freeways.

Over a casual outdoor lunch or dinner on the bluff at Nelson's, you'll soak up a true California coastal vibe, especially when music jam sessions are held in summer. Classic TV buffs will

recognize that the venue is named for the Lloyd Bridges diver character Mike Nelson in *Sea Hunt*, much of which was shot down below in Marineland days.



From a tub, Terranea Spa sea views are almost as relaxing as the treatments.

Terranea guests can also sign up for the occasional Chef's Table, and special wine pairings with cuisine based on harvests procured from the chefs' favorite California farms. No matter where one dines, the after-dinner jazz scene in the lounge off the Lobby Bar features fine L.A.'s working musicians.

As for all 582 Terranea rooms, a full 360 of them are located in the main hotel. With full kitchens, fifty three-bedroom ocean view Casitas and 32 Villas are nicely private. The twenty Bungalows in front of the spa and closest to the sea cliffs have their own little secluded vibe. A nice added touch at this eco-friendly property is the collection of nature books in the rooms, such as fine editions of *Audubon's Birds of North America*.

At the Spa at Terranea, the honey for the Honey Body Bliss massage comes from the property's own bee hives. Premium room guests have access to a private pool and cabanas there, where you might enjoy an energizing smoothie from the Spa Café after a treatment.

Terranea manages the trick of keeping its ample meeting facilities distinctly separate from its leisure scene. Weddings galore take place on the huge grounds, which have even been known to accommodate an elephant for Indian celebrations. The property is super dog friendly as well, with guests walking their pooches all over the grounds.



Falconer Joe Roy and his birds are a frequent sight at the Terranea grounds.

A few times a week, falconer Joe Roy comes to the property with his 18-year-old peregrine-gyrfalcon named Omen, and a Eurasian eagle owl Albert, as well as Harris Hawks. The birds are not only a thrilling educational sight for families, but they discourage seagulls from taking over the grounds. Falcon hunting demonstrations, as all activities, can be booked through the Adventure Concierge desk.

On the short walk over to the historic Point Vicente lighthouse on the next cove over, guests can spot local birdlife enjoying the property's bioswales, or water filtering ponds. At the little [Point Vicente Interpretive Center](#), fine exhibits explain the unique Palos Verdes geology, and honor the history and culture of the local Tongva Tribe.

Palos Verdes was once a center of thriving Japanese gardening communities. Chef Bernard Ibarra is rightly proud of Terranea's Catalina View Garden which lies in the same hills just a few miles from the property. Guests can tour the garden to learn about the resort's sustainable culinary practices and to discover how they go about harvesting avocado, and making olive oil, goat cheese and other artisanal goodies.

Back at the resort itself, those who think that the entire California coast faces due west will be surprised to enjoy stunning views of both sunrise and sunset along Terranea's south-facing coastal frontage. It's yet another of the natural wonders to be found daily at this surprising L.A. property.